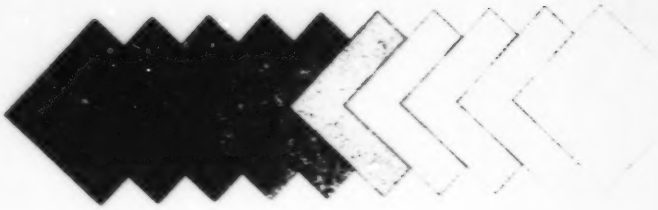
MOVING FORWARD



Initiatives for Women in B.C.

Women's Programs

A Response to the Advisory Council on
Community-Based Programs for Women

91-02376/

Carol Gran

In presenting this response by government to the recommendations of the Advisory Council on Community-Based Programs for Women, I want to thank the members of the Council for their dedication and hard work in preparing their report. Their insights into the issues have been invaluable in helping government move forward for the women in the province.

Since British Columbia's earliest days, women have made a major contribution to the social, political and economic vitality of British Columbia. But while they have played a significant role in the development of our province, they continue to encounter barriers to achieving economic and social independence.

In the past, these barriers were addressed on an individual basis. Today, their solution demands a coordinated, concerted approach involving both government and communities.

This document, which reinforces government's commitment to leadership and to work as partners with all sectors of society to bring about the advancement of women, clearly reflects this approach.

The Advisory Council on Community-Based Programs for Women was established to examine the delivery of women's services and to recommend a strategy for coordinating community and government resources. The resulting recommendations were far-reaching and well-considered. Government's response to these recommendations reflects its commitment to facilitate women's move toward economic independence.

As government, we agree with many of the recommendations brought forward by the Council. We share its belief that achieving economic independence is vital if women are to achieve their full potential in our province.

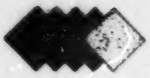
Government will therefore work in partnership with community organizations, private institutions and individual women to bring about changes in attitude, remove barriers and deliver effective, meaningful programs to support the advancement of women.

I firmly believe that the initiatives we are undertaking will have far-reaching impact for the women of B.C. By working together — government, communities, women's organizations and individual women — we can achieve our goals.

I encourage your active participation in the work ahead of us. Let us move forward with a renewed vision and a renewed commitment to building a fairer society for all British Columbians.

Honourable Carol Gran
Minister of Government
Management Services and
Minister Responsible for
Women's Programs

January 1991



COMMITMENT TO ACTION

The provincial government recognizes that women are an integral part of the economic, political, and social life of British Columbia. Women's contribution will increase if they have more opportunities and choices to participate in all segments of our society. To gain insight into how opportunities for women can be created and enhanced, the Minister Responsible for Women's Programs consulted with the women of the province.

In February and March of 1990, the Minister Responsible for Women's Programs toured the province to meet women and to discuss their concerns. In April, the Minister brought together an Advisory Council on Community-Based Programs for Women. The women represented a wide range of interests and backgrounds, and as a group, were able to address the concerns of women at all levels.

Both forums stressed that many women continue to strive towards economic independence. Furthermore, it was emphasized that government could help bring about change and assist women by focusing on:

- equality in the work place;
- affordable, quality child care;
- education and training for women; and
- the prevention of family violence.

In response to these priorities the government has developed a plan of action and a series of initiatives to help women achieve economic independence.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

The Advisory Council on Community-Based Programs for Women states that "the provincial government must take a leadership role in addressing the impact of attitudes across all ministries and government bodies" (p. 16). It suggests this can take place by introducing initiatives to ensure employment equity and by having the provincial government show leadership by acting as a model employer.

Government has addressed the issue of leadership by developing a Pay Equity Plan for its employees. The pay equity program will be implemented over a four-year period at an estimated cost of $40 million, and will address gender bias in job classifications and pay practices.

Government also promotes equality in the work place by supporting employment equity. The elimination of employment disadvantages historically experienced by women and minority groups is a commitment of this government.

Working women consistently note that current levels of accessibility and affordability of child care must be improved. The Advisory Council states that "the critical shortage of affordable, quality daycare is a major barrier to women achieving economic independence" (p. 7). **The Minister Responsible for Women's Programs supports the conclusion of the Council and has responded accordingly. A task force has been established to examine the issue of child care and appropriate steps will be taken.**

Government's approach to women's issues is broad-based in that support for women's economic independence is not limited to women in the work force. **A strategy to expand pension coverage in British Columbia is being developed, and government will be consulting with the public to ensure that this initiative is supported.**

Government also agrees with the Advisory Council that programs supported by attitudinal change will have a dramatic and positive impact. Understanding and eliminating stereotypical attitudes about the roles available to women and the barriers to advancement that they face, is an important step in achieving equality. **As outlined in the Royal Commission on Education, introducing gender equity to the educational system is one means of achieving gender equality. The B.C. Government is therefore implementing the gender equity recommendations of the Royal Commission on Education.**

Government is also taking the initiative by encouraging gender equity in post-secondary institutions. All B.C. universities have gender equity programs making formal attempts to increase the number of women faculty members, especially in the science and technology fields. Together, the provincial and federal governments are developing a British Columbia Action Plan to increase the participation of women in apprenticeship programs.

Attitudinal changes must be encouraged in the home as well as the work place. The Advisory Council suggests a "strong, unequivocal message must be delivered that violence against women will not be tolerated" (p. 15). **Government agrees with this viewpoint and accordingly has announced several new initiatives to counter family violence. A Sexual Abuse Interventions Project has been announced, as well as a Wife Assault Coordination Project. In addition, a public information campaign will be launched to emphasize that family violence is a crime and that assistance to victims is available.**

The Government of British Columbia supports the conclusions of the Advisory Council on Community-Based Programs for Women. It firmly believes that achieving economic independence is vital to ensuring that women have increased opportunities to contribute to the political, social and economic life of the province.

COORDINATED STRATEGIES

The following section describes in detail major government initiatives which respond to the recommendations of the Advisory Council on Community-Based Programs for Women. The Council's report covers a broad spectrum of concerns and issues. In responding to these recommendations, three major themes emerged:

Economic Independence

- *programs and services which assist women to achieve full economic independence;*

Supportive Services

- *services not directly linked to economic independence, but which support and enable women to achieve self-reliance and independence; and*

Responsive Government

- *programs and policies designed to increase government's responsiveness to the needs and concerns of women, including its employees and its clients.*

These three categories focus government's response to the Advisory Council. Included is a brief description of some of the initiatives which government already delivers to women.

Working together, governments and communities can ensure that all women have access to the services and programs they need.

Economic Independence

The opportunity to achieve economic independence is fundamental to the women of this province. Women must have equal access to all career opportunities, and the ability to remain financially independent after retirement.

Education and training play a critical role in providing the skills to enter and advance in the labour market. The close link between income and pensions highlights the importance of ensuring that women have access to jobs and careers which are well paying.

Government has many programs which improve women's access to education and training opportunities. There are also other important initiatives currently being developed which support the recommendations of the Advisory Council to expand the potential for women's economic independence. Specific steps include:

Pay Equity

- As one of the province's largest employers, the government is providing leadership in developing and implementing a Pay Equity Plan for its employees.
- It is estimated that implementation of this plan will cost the government $40 million over a four-year phase-in period.
- Pay equity addresses gender bias in job classifications and pay practices.
- By demonstrating its commitment to removing gender bias, government encourages other public sector employers to initiate similar programs.

Pension Reform

- Assisting women's economic independence is not limited to assisting women in the work force. A paper on Pension Reform, which will enhance pension coverage, has been proposed. A discussion paper on the new pension initiatives will soon be presented.

Education and Training

- Government supports efforts to increase the range of occupations available to women in the province. Funds will be made available for new employment and training initiatives for groups such as women, natives, visible minorities, immigrants, and the disabled.
- Government recognizes that education and training for women is the key to economic independence. To assess programs delivered by government, a working group will examine women's participation in, and access to, employment and training, including English as a Second Language services. The group will then identify measures and associated costs required to remove barriers, expand services and improve access.
- ESL services are critical to the successful settlement and integration of immigrant women. The Ministries of Advanced Education, Training and Technology; International Business and Immigration; and Women's Programs are assessing and evaluating current service levels and ways to increase their availability.

- Funds will be made available for employment and training initiatives for groups such as women, natives, immigrants, visible minorities and persons with disabilities.

Employment Equity

- The goal of this policy is to obtain a balanced representation of women at all levels and in all occupations in the public service.
- Government's promotion of women in the public service is illustrated by the steadily increasing number of women managers, from 17.3 percent in 1986, to 27.5 percent in April, 1990.
- Ministries are actively working to eliminate employment barriers historically experienced by women, aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, and visible minorities.

By developing and delivering programs to improve access, the government has provided leadership in assisting women to fulfill their education and training needs. Examples of current initiatives include:

- The Ministry of Education's Gender Equity Plan ensures that educational programs allow both girls and boys the opportunity to realize their potential.
- A Sub-Committee on Equity in Apprenticeship was established in 1989 to implement the recommendations of a joint federal-provincial review of the B.C. Apprenticeship Program. This program encourages women to consider non-traditional occupations.

- In 1990, Women's Programs awarded over $333,000 in grants for projects throughout B.C. which support innovative employment and training programs for women.
- The "Access for All" initiative sponsored by the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology, increases the opportunities in post-secondary education and training for women as well as men. The new University of the North, planned for the Prince George area, will be accessible to women in many northern and remote communities.
- All B.C. universities have gender equity programs making formal attempts to increase the number of women faculty members, especially in the science and technology fields.
- The participation of young girls and women in science and technology is supported by several government initiatives. For example, What Do Scientists Do?, a series of four videos accompanied by a teaching guide, provides positive role models for elementary schoolgirls
- The Ministry of Social Services and Housing provides education and training services to income assistance recipients, 65 percent of whom are women.
- In recognizing 1990 as the International Year of Literacy, British Columbia continues to expand literacy upgrading programs for women. These programs pay particular attention to issues of access for women in attaining basic skills.
- The province is active in examining ways to expand ESL services. In 1990/91, over $8 million will be spent on ESL programs for adults. Several unique approaches to ESL

training have been developed, including home delivery and outreach activities designed to meet the needs of immigrant women. Meeting the language needs of children in the school system is also a high priority, and the province has budgeted $23 million in 1990/91 for ESL instruction.

Government has provided leadership as a major employer by ensuring that women have equal opportunities to advance in the public service. In addition to new initiatives in the areas of pay equity and employment equity, each ministry is responsible for developing and implementing annual Action Plans which address advancement opportunities for women in the public service. Initiatives include: posting temporary appointments and secondment opportunities, development of flexible work options, the implementation of bridging positions for women, and the review and revision of recruitment and selection practices.

ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE: SUMMARY OF NEW INITIATIVES

- An expansion of English as a Second Language training through provincial colleges has been requested.
- A Pay Equity Program is being implemented over a four-year period at a cost of $40 million.
- The Gender Equity Recommendations advanced by the Royal Commission on Education are being implemented.
- A Provincial Action Plan is being developed to encourage more women to participate in apprenticeship programs.
- A paper proposing pension reform will be presented for public review and consultation.
- Employment equity is being addressed by government and new initiatives are being explored.

Support Services

Government and communities share a responsibility for providing support services to women and children which enhance individual dignity and responsibility. The Advisory Council identified child care and counselling services as key to women's participation in society. In addition, information gathered during the Minister's consultation tour highlighted the importance of providing assistance to those who suffer from family violence.

Government and communities can respond to these needs by seeking ways to expand the services available to women, while enabling individuals to continue to strive for self-sufficiency.

In support of the Advisory Council's report, government has undertaken several new initiatives to supplement existing programs in the areas of child care, family violence and counselling.

Child Care

- On July 5, 1990, the Minister Responsible for Women's Programs appointed a Task Force on Child Care to examine the expansion of the number of child care spaces in B.C. Established in response to the Advisory Council's recommendation to provide more child care spaces, the Task Force will present its strategies to the Minister early in 1991.
- Ministry of Social Services and Housing provides: subsidies for low income parents to assist with the costs of child care; grants to non-profit societies to assist with the costs of repairs, costs of relocation of existing centers and costs incurred to equip and furnish new centers; and funds daycare support programs which recruit, train and support informal child care providers.

- Ministry of Health licenses and monitors child care facilities.
- Ministry of Provincial Secretary, Lottery Grants Branch, assists non-profit societies with up to 1/3 of capital costs to create new child care spaces.
- Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology provides funding to colleges for Early Childhood Education (ECE) courses.
- Government has stated its intention to encourage and promote employer-supported child care. A child care needs survey of government employees in Victoria, Nanaimo, Kelowna and Prince George has been completed, and an infant child care centre has been established at Ministry of Health headquarters.

Family Violence

- On June 12, 1990, a $3 million interministry Sexual Abuse Interventions Project was announced. Assessment, counselling and consultation services will be provided to target populations, including women.
- The $170,000 Wife Assault Coordination Project was established to coordinate services for victims of wife assault, and ensure that women have access to these services within their communities. This project recognizes the need to prevent and eliminate family violence. (Ministry of Attorney General).
- A public information campaign which includes a 60-second television message is being developed to reaffirm that family violence is a crime, and that those experiencing violence can obtain assistance and treatment.

- Supportive services to physically or sexually assaulted women are provided through some 90 Victim Assistance Programs and seven Sexual Assault Centres across the province (Ministries of Attorney General and Solicitor General).
- There are 44 transition houses/emergency shelters and 8 safe homes in B.C. The 25 percent budget increase in 1990/91 will increase the number of beds in these facilities from 400 to more than 500 (The Ministry of Social Services and Housing).

Counselling

- Government recognizes that no one ministry has the responsibility for delivering counselling services to women. However, more needs to be done to identify specific needs, issues and opportunities in this area. Government and communities must meet to identify the range of activities included under the title of "counselling services", to assess existing services, gaps in service and options for providing enhanced services.

SUPPORT SERVICES: SUMMARY OF NEW INITIATIVES

- A task force has been established to examine the issue of child care.
- A $3 million interministry Sexual Abuse Interventions Project has been introduced.
- A Wife Assault Coordination Project has been funded.
- An information campaign is being created to emphasize that family violence is a crime and that help is available.
- A consultative process will be established so that communities and government can examine local needs and develop appropriate programs for counselling services in the communities.

More Responsive Government

The Advisory Council on Community-Based Programs for Women recognized the need to increase the planning and coordination of community services. The differences between communities and the services required reinforces the importance of community involvement in identifying the approaches which best meet their unique needs.

To assist in the development of community-based programs for women, the Minister Responsible for Women's Programs has made $500,000 available for short-term grant funding to community groups. This funding will assist them to develop a strategy for increased community involvement, coordination of community services, and/or the expansion of funding sources, including community and government resources.

To be responsive, government must be accessible throughout the province. The Minister Responsible for Women's Programs has established regional offices to assist communities to plan, develop and deliver programs to women.

Government demonstrates leadership to other employers by developing policies which promote equality. Ensuring that women realize their potential and continue to make a positive and increasing contribution to the economy of B.C. is a goal of government. Towards this end, government will:

- strive toward balancing the number of male and female members appointed to boards, commissions and advisory bodies;
- develop and implement an awareness campaign for government managers to provide them with the tools to identify barriers to women's employment and advancement;

- establish a gender-neutral language policy for use in all government documents; and
- ensure that government publications include materials which assist in the identification of barriers to all women, including minority groups such as native women.

The Advisory Council examined government's internal processes and procedures and made several recommendations to improve responsiveness to women's concerns in the development of policy and the delivery of programs. Government appreciates the insights offered by the Council and accepts the goal of these recommendations. The Minister Responsible for Women's Programs has been appointed as a member of Treasury Board to ensure women's concerns are addressed as major policies and programs are introduced or amended. In moving towards an even more responsive government, the following initiatives will be developed and implemented. Government will:

- include statements on all Treasury Board and Cabinet Submissions which assess policy and program impacts on special groups such as women, natives, immigrants, visible minorities, seniors, and persons with disabilities;
- establish regular special meetings of the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy to discuss issues of concern to women and invite other Ministers to participate and contribute;
- ensure that regional offices provide an advisory role which reflects the particular issues and needs of specific communities;

- continue to establish advisory bodies to assist government in examining and analyzing important and specific issues of concern to women throughout the province;
- ensure that new and existing programs and policies are assessed for their responsiveness to the needs of women; and
- review the feasibility, validity and cost of gathering gender-related information about government employees and clients.

MORE RESPONSIVE GOVERNMENT: SUMMARY OF NEW INITIATIVES

- Minister Responsible for Women's Programs was appointed as a member of Treasury Board.
- Treasury Board and Cabinet Submissions will include statements which assess impact on target groups.
- Cabinet Committee on Social Policy will meet regularly to discuss issues of concern to women.
- Regional offices have been established to assist communities to effectively plan and deliver services to women.
- A policy which supports gender balance on boards, commissions and advisory bodies will be developed.
- A policy to use gender-neutral language in all government documents will be established.

PROMOTING EQUITY

- A Pay Equity Program will be implemented over a four-year period at a cost of $40 million.
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- Regional offices have been established to assist communities to effectively plan and deliver services to women.
- A consultative process will be established so that communities and government can examine local needs and develop appropriate programs for counselling services in the community.